

Development of the Shāradā Alphabet 11th-13th Centuries

We have discussed above in detail the features of the Shāradā characters as they first appear in the epigraphic records of the 9th and the 10th centuries. We now proceed to discuss their development in the 11th, 12th and the 13th centuries on the basis of the following records:

1. Coins of the following rulers of Kashmir and NWFP: Ananta (A.D. 1028-63), Kalasha (A.D. 1063-89), Harsa (A.D. 1089-1101), Uccala (A.D. 1101-11), Sussala (A.D. 1112-20), Jayasimha (A.D. 1128-55) and Mahmud of Ghazni.¹
2. Hund (NWFP) inscription of Mahārājñi Kameshwaridevī (Shāhi). *Sam* 169 (A.D. 1019).²
3. Bhakund (Chamba H.P.) fountain inscription of the reign of Trailokyadeva, *Shāstra* (410)4 (A.D. 1028-29).³
4. Dacchan (district Doda, Jammu) stone inscription of the reign of Shri(A)Nantadeva, (Laukika) *sam*(410)12 (A.D. 1036).⁴
5. Kulait (Chamba, H.P.) copper plate inscription of Somavarman (11th century).⁵
6. Chamba copper plate inscription of Somavarman and Āsaṭavarman (11th century).⁶
7. Thundu (Chamba, H.P.) copper plate inscription of Āsaṭavarman (11th century).⁷
8. Luj (Chamba, H.P.) fountain inscription of the 1st year of Jāsaṭa, *Shāstra* (41)81 (A.D. 1105-6).⁸
9. S.P.S. Museum, Srinagar stone slab inscription of the reign of Jayasimha (*Laukika*) *sam* (42)25 (A.D. 1149).⁹
10. Tapar (Kashmir) stone lintel inscription of Parmāṇḍadeva (*Laukika*) *sam* (42) 33 (A.D. 1157).¹⁰
11. Devi-ri-kothi (Chamba, H.P.) fountain inscriptions of Rājānaka Nāgapāla (A.D. 1159-61) and Rājānaka Raṇapāla.¹¹
12. Salhi (Chamba, H.P.) fountain inscription of Rājānaka Ludrapāla of the 27th year

of Lalitavarman, *Shāstra* (42) 46 (A.D. 1170).¹²

13. Arigom (Kashmir) stone slab inscription (Laukika) *Sam* (42)73 (A.D. 1197).¹³
14. Baijnath (district, Kangra, H.P.) Shiva temple inscriptions *Shaka* 1126 (A.D. 1204).¹⁴
15. Vejebror (Kashmir) stone inscription of the reign of Rājadeva (*Shaka*) *Sam* 58 (A.D. 1236).¹⁵

Details of the Forms

1. Vowels (See Table 3)

1. The vowels *a* and *ā* retain their earlier forms and do not exhibit any significant change. Only in very rare cases do we find *a* with a closed top as, for example, in some coins of Mahmud of Ghazni (col. I) and in one case in the Thundu copper plate grant of Asatavarman (col. VII), line 21 (*atī*). This form of the letter becomes common in the later *Shāradā* of Kashmir and in the *Devāshesha* of Chamba.
2. The initial *i* preserves its older shape consisting of two dots and a curve below. In the copper plate inscription the curve is small while in the stone inscriptions it turns round and moves further to the left. In the Bhakund fountain inscription (col. III) and the Thundu copper plate grant (col. III) the two dots are replaced by two small circles. VII
3. The initial *ī*, the solitary instance of which we noticed in the Sarahan Prashasti above shows a distinct development in the Baijnath Shiva temple inscriptions (col. XIV) where the two dots which stood previously on the either side of the central vertical now appear above the top of the letter. The same form of *ī* is regularly met with in the later *Shāradā* and the *Devāshesha*.
4. *u* and *ū* preserve their earlier forms except that in the Bhakund fountain inscription col. III) *u* shows a loop in the middle.
5. No instance of initial *r* is found in the *Shāradā* records of the period.
6. The initial *e* displays no significant change.
7. The initial *ai* also does not occur in the records of the period.

8. The initial *o* which occurs mostly in the syllable *om* is formed like *u* with the addition of a wedge at the left top end. In the Bhakund inscription (col. III) the wedge is replaced by a small triangle. An uncommon form of *o* occurs in the Baijnath Shiva temple inscription (col. XIV) where instead of a wedge we find a curve attached to the back of *u* and similar to that of initial *ū*.
9. No instance of initial *au* is noticed in our records.

II Consonants

Gutterals

10. *k* generally preserves its earlier form with a loop to the left. In certain cases, however, it develops a second loop to the right evidently caused by the contact of the right hand curve with the bottom of the central vertical. This doubled looped form of the letter is regularly found in the later *Shāradā* and the *Devāshesa*. In our records the example of the doubled looped *k* are found in the Dacchan (col. IV), Salhi (col. XII) and Arigom (col. XIII) inscriptions.
11. *kh* occurs regularly with a flat top and a vertical to the left. The archaic form with rounded top and cursive stroke on the left as found in the Sungal copper plate grant above becomes rare.
12. *g* with a serif, wedge or a small upward stroke at the foot of the left vertical demonstrates no change except some times a small triangle replaces the wedge. A unique form of the letter is noticed in the Dacchan inscription (col. IV) in the word *guptena* l. 3.
13. In *gh* the development is marked by the elongation of the right hand stroke which hence forth becomes the regular feature of the letter.
14. *ñ* which occurs only in ligature with *k* and *g* generally preserves its earlier shape. An uncommon form occurs in the Arigom inscription (col. XIII) where the wedge at the right end is replaced by a small vertical which protrudes down and touches the lower slanting stroke, in *Gaṅgashvara*, l. 2.

slanting

Palatals

15. *c* occurs mostly in quadrangular form. The ancient rounded form occurs only in one case in the Chamba grant of Somavarman and Āsatavarman. In the Dacchan

inscription (col. IV) and the S.P.S. Museum inscription of Jayasimha (col. IX) the letter shows a circular loop to left. In the Vejebror inscription (col. XV) it occurs with open top.

16. The conservative letters *ch* and *j* occur in their ancient forms and hardly present anything remarkable.
17. No instance of *jh* is found either singly or in ligatures in the records of the period under review.
18. The palatal nasal which occurs only in ligatures retains its earlier form with minor variations here and there.

Cerebrals

19. *t* occurs regularly with a flat top and generally with a wedge or a serif at the right top end. The archaic rounded form found in Dewai and Barikot inscriptions above now becomes rare.
20. *th* is as usual represented by a circle.
21. *d* shows regularly a wedge or a serif at the lower end.
22. Of the three forms of cerebral *n* one with connecting base stroke becomes rare and is found only in one case in the Bhakund fountain inscription (col. III). The other two forms continue to be used with equal regularity.

Dentals

23. *t* a conservative character in Shāradā remains unchanged. A peculiar form occurs in the Bhakund inscription (col. III) where the letter is provided with a loop in the middle.
24. *th* shows a flat top and is lozenge or rectangular in shape. Ancient crescent form becomes rare.
25. *d* does not exhibit any material change except that it shows a loop in the left limb in the Bhakund inscription (col. III) and a unique form resembling the rounded *α* in the Dacchan inscription (col. IV).
26. *dh* shows regularly a flat top and is usually angular in shape. The cursive forms

occur only in the copper plate inscriptions.

27. The dental nasal agrees closely with the modern *n* of the Devanagari. An uncommon looped form occurs in the Bhakund inscription (col. III).

Labials

28. The labials *p* and *ph* retain their earlier characteristics and exhibit no significant change.
29. *b* is usually represented by *v* and will be described subsequently.
30. *bh* generally shows a wedge in the middle. In some cases, the wedge is replaced by a triangular loop as, for example, in the S.P.S. Museum inscription of Jayasimha (col. IX) and in the Nārāyaṇa Image (Devi-ri-kothi) inscription of Rājānaka Nāgapāla (col. XI). The letter occurs with a less pronounced wedge or an open triangle in the Hund (col. II), Bhakund (col. III) and Luj (col. VIII) inscriptions.
31. *m* does not present anything remarkable except that the right hand vertical more frequently protrudes downwards.

Semi Vowels

32. *y* occurs in a developed form with a closed top in the Arigom stone slab inscription (col. XIII). This form of the letter is frequently met with in the later records of Kashmir. In our all other records the letter retains its earlier shape with open top.
33. *r* generally shows a wedge at the lower end of the vertical to the left. The wedge is occasionally replaced by a small triangle, for example, in Bhakund (col. III), Dacchan (col. IV), S.P.S. Museum (col. IX) and in one instance in the Devī-ki-kothi inscription of Nagapala (col. XI). In the copper plate inscriptions (col. V, VI, VII) we find in place of a wedge a small upward stroke attached to the vertical on the left. In the Dacchan inscription (col. IV) the letter occurs with a big triangular loop on the left.
34. *l* displays no change except that the right hand vertical is regularly elongated downwards.
35. *v* which also represents *b* has a flat top and is both angular and cursive in shape. In the S.P.S. museum inscription (col. IX) it shows uncommon form resembling *y*

with closed top. Another unique form occurs in the Dacchan inscription (col. IV) where the letter looks like *dh*.

36. *sh* occurs with a loop, wedge, open triangle (col. VII) or a triangular loop as in Bhakund (col. III), S.P.S. Museum (col. IX) and in as Devi-ri-kothi inscription of Nagapala (col. XI). The letter is regularly marked with a downward elongation of the right hand vertical.
37. *s* retains its conservative character.
38. *s* shares all the characteristics with *sh* but is distinguished from the latter by its open top.
39. *h* shows no material change except that the curve below often moves further towards the left.
40. *Jihvāmālīya* generally retains its earlier form. In the Baijnath inscription (col. XIV) it is more angular in shape.
41. *Upadhmānīya* occurs in a changed form and may be described as cerebral *ṇ* with a horizontal line below. Its shape resembles that of the Gilgitt manuscripts noted above.

Virāma

Virama is expressed by a slanting stroke running through the right top end of the vowel less consonant. In the ~~Veigebor~~ inscription (col. XV) we, however, find the stroke running through the middle of the *akshara*. The consonants mostly *t* and *m* with which the *virāma* is attached appear in modified forms in the copper plate inscriptions (col. V, VI, VII) and occasionally in the Bhakund inscription (col. III). In all other records they retain their fuller and complete forms.

III The Medial Vowels

The methods for expressing medial *ā* continue to be practically the same as in the preceding centuries. The following peculiarities, however, deserve notice.

1. The hook or semicircle peculiar to *ñā*, *ṭā* and *ṇā* has also been attached to *ñā* (*jñā*) in a Devi-ri-kothi inscription (col. XI), to *ḍā* and *yā* in the Salhi fountain inscription (col. XII) and to *jā* in the Baijnath inscriptions (col. XIV).

2. The medial *i* and *ī* are rendered more frequently by the long curves drawn respectively to the left and right of the consonants. The small curves placed over the consonants occur only in the copper plate inscriptions (col. V, VI, VII). The sickle shaped medial *i* occurs only in one case in *nī* (l. 1) in the Thundu copper plate inscription (col. VII).
3. The signs for expressing the medial *u* are the same as in the earlier records. These are indiscriminately used in one and the same line.
4. Medial *ū* is expressed in the older fashion, viz., by a wavy or slanting line attached to the foot of the vertical on the left side or by the subscribed initial *ū*.
5. Medial *r* is both cursive and angular in shape.
6. Medial *e* continues to be expressed by a *prishthamātrā* or a superscribed stroke either horizontal or slanting. The *prishthamātrā* denoted by a small down stroke becomes a full fledged vertical in the Arigom inscription (col. XIII).
7. Only in two inscriptions, viz., Dacchan (col. IV) and Devi-ri-kothi (col. XI) we find medial *ai* expressed by two superscribed strokes. In all other inscriptions the sign is expressed as earlier, by a *prishthamātrā* combined with the superscribed *e* stroke.
8. Medial *o* is expressed more often by superscribed flourish and less frequently by a wedge at the left top end combined with a superscribed *e* stroke. The ancient method of two wedges attached to both ends of the top of the letter becomes rare and is found only in the Arigom inscription (col. XIII) where, however, the wedges have been replaced by long down-strokes.
9. Medial *au* is rendered throughout by the combination of superscribed flourish and the *a* mark. The method of expressing the vowel by two wedges attached to both ends of the top bar combined with the superscribed *e* stroke and used in the Sarahan Prashasti above becomes obsolete.

IV Ligatures

1. As in the previous period *k* as the first or the middle part of the ligature retains its archaic cross bar form. As a final part of the ligature its form remains intact.

- 2 Superscript \tilde{n} and \tilde{n} do not present any significant change.
- 3 The subscribed \tilde{n} in ligature $j\tilde{n}\bar{a}$ has, as in the earlier records, the shape of numerals 3 and is attached to the upper consonant in varied positions, sometimes lying, sometimes straight and sometimes half straight half lying. A peculiar form occurs in the Devi-ri-kothi inscription (col. XI) and the Salhi fountain inscription (col. XII) where the letter loses its upper portion and is represented just by a curve open to the left.
- 4 l as the final member of the ligature retains only its lower portion as in the earlier period.
- 5 The s like form of the subscribed th which occurred occasionally in the earlier records now becomes more common. Spiral form occur only in copper plate inscriptions (col. V, VI, VII). Peculiar forms are noticed in Hund (col. II) inscription in sth and in Luj inscription (col. VIII) in rth .
- 6 y as the final element of the ligature continues to be denoted by a curve which is now more pronounced and moves further to the right.
- 7 Υ as the first part of the ligature with y and n loses its bottom part as noticed in the previous period.
- 8 Υ in ligature rv continues to be marked by a small excrescence on the left.
- 9 In ligatures where r forms the middle or the final element it is usually rendered as in the earlier period by an upward stroke attached to the lower end of the upper consonant on the left. In certain cases as in Salhi (col. XII) and the Arigom (col. XIII) inscriptions it is rendered by a slanting stroke drawn from left to the right. In ligature tr in the Thundu inscription the subscribed r is accompanied by a small down stroke in the middle.
- 10 The ligature st and sth usually have an identical shape with their true value ascertainable only by the content in which they occur in the inscription. Sometimes distinction is sought to be made by representing subscribed th in its initial form with a tail as, for example in Arigom (col. XIII) and Hund inscriptions (col. II). In Arigom inscription st is also rendered as sth .

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Cunningham, A. *Coins of Medaeval India*. Plates IV, V, VII; Rodgers, *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. XLVIII, Plate 18..
2. *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. XXII, pp. 97 ff. and plate.
3. Vogel, J.Ph., *Antiquities of Chamba State*, Part I, pp. 177 ff. and Plate XX.
4. Kaul Deambi, *Corpus of Sharada Inscriptions of Kashmir* pp. 149 f.
5. Vogel, *Ibid* pp. 182 ff. and Plate XXIV.
6. *Ibid* pp. 187 ff. and Plate XXV.
7. *Ibid* pp. 197 ff. and Plate XXVI.
8. *Ibid*. pp. 202 ff. and Plate XXVIII.
9. Kaul Deambi, *op. cit.* p. 102 and Plate No. 4.
10. *Ibid* pp. 103 f. and Plate No. 5.
11. Vogel *op. cit.* pp. 207 ff.; Plates XXIX, XXX.
12. *Ibid* pp. 216 ff. and Plate XXXII.
13. Kaul Deambi, *op. cit.* pp. 197 ff Plate No. 6.
14. Buhler G. , *Epigraphia Indica*, V pp. 197 ff, *Indian Palaeography* Plate V.
15. Kaul Deambi *op. cit.* pp. 110 ff. Plate No. 7.